

## Relations industrielles Industrial Relations



# Staying the Decline in Union Membership : Union Organizing in Ontario, 1985-1999

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Volume 55, numéro 4, 2000

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/051352ar>  
DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/051352ar>

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Éditeur(s)

Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval

ISSN

0034-379X (imprimé)  
1703-8138 (numérique)

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Citer cet article

Yates, C. A. B. (2000). Staying the Decline in Union Membership : Union Organizing in Ontario, 1985-1999. *Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, 55(4), 640–674. <https://doi.org/10.7202/051352ar>

### Résumé de l'article

Les syndicats en Ontario, et au Canada en général, ont dû faire face à une crise d'adhésion. Cette crise est le résultat de la restructuration économique, des changements politiques et législatifs, et des employeurs enhardis dans leur opposition aux syndicats. Les taux de syndicalisation sont en déclin ou stagnants et il y a des bas taux de syndicalisation dans des secteurs croissants de l'économie, plus particulièrement dans les industries de services du secteur privé. Cette étude, centrée sur l'Ontario, examine la réponse des syndicats à ces défis, à travers la syndicalisation des non-syndiqués.

Cette étude soutient que, face à un climat politique et économique de plus en plus hostile aux syndicats, les syndicats ont augmenté les ressources investies dans la syndicalisation. Ils ont changé leurs projets organisationnels et ont décidé de mettre la priorité sur l'organisation des services dans le secteur privé en adoptant plusieurs stratégies d'organisation innovatrices créées pour obtenir un meilleur taux de réussite dans la syndicalisation. L'adoption de ces stratégies démontre que les syndicats sont capables de s'adapter pour faire face à de nouveaux défis. Le résultat probable de l'adoption de cette voie est que les syndicats auront la capacité de renverser le déclin récent dans le taux de syndicalisation et pourront commencer à accroître le nombre de leurs membres.

Les arguments dans cette étude sont fondés sur trois sources d'information : (1) les informations sur l'accréditation syndicale disponibles auprès de la Commission des relations du travail de l'Ontario, (2) un questionnaire détaillé administré aux organisateurs syndicaux, basé sur le travail de Kate Bronfenbrenner aux États-Unis, et (3) des informations qualitatives à partir des entrevues avec des organisateurs syndicaux, les documents de politiques syndicales ainsi que d'autres documents syndicaux internes.

En se basant sur des informations de la Commission des relations du travail de l'Ontario et sur l'analyse publiée de Martinello (2000) sur les accréditations syndicales en Ontario, cette étude démontre que les tentatives de syndicalisation, les réussites et le nombre de salariés recrutés ont été les plus nombreux sous le gouvernement NPD. Quand les conservateurs sont arrivés au pouvoir, ces succès ont diminué, menant, en général, à moins de campagnes de recrutement, à un taux de réussite moins élevé, et à un nombre plus petit d'employés organisés. Cette expérience, qui a rendu les employeurs plus agressifs et qui a accéléré les changements sur le marché du travail, a amené plusieurs syndicats à augmenter leurs efforts de recrutement. En effet, beaucoup de syndicats avaient déjà identifié la syndicalisation comme étant la clé de leur survie.

En examinant les données pour six syndicats — le Syndicat des métaux unis de l'Amérique (MUA), le Syndicat international des travailleurs et travailleuses unis de l'alimentation et du commerce (TUAC), les Travailleurs et les travailleuses canadiens de l'automobile (TCA), la Fraternité unie des charpentiers et menuisiers d'Amérique (FUCMA), le Syndicat canadien de la fonction publique (SCFP) et la Fraternité internationale des Teamsters —, cette étude démontre qu'ils ont augmenté la priorité interne ainsi que les ressources (l'argent et le personnel) consacrées à l'organisation. Cet engagement plus grand et l'investissement dans la syndicalisation a permis à plusieurs des six syndicats de soutenir des efforts qui ont résulté dans un taux de réussite raisonnable pendant les années du gouvernement conservateur et d'hostilité accrue de la part des employeurs.

Cette étude soutient que les syndicats ne peuvent pas augmenter le nombre de leurs membres sans un investissement de temps et de ressources accrues ; mais que ces moyens seuls ne suffisent pas pour faire face à la crise grandissante d'adhésion syndicale. Les stratégies syndicales déterminent comment les ressources sont investies et si ces investissements produisent des résultats satisfaisants. Compte tenu qu'il y a eu un déclin de l'emploi dans les secteurs où historiquement les syndicats étaient fort présents, par exemple dans le secteur manufacturier, l'étude examine deux aspects de la stratégie d'organisation des syndicats : (1) les réponses syndicales aux changements survenus sur le marché du travail, en particulier, la montée du nombre d'emplois dans le secteur privé et dans le taux de participation des femmes au marché du travail, et (2) les stratégies syndicales sélectives pour organiser les non-syndiqués.

En se basant sur les chiffres concernant l'accréditation syndicale de la Commission des relations du travail de l'Ontario et sur les résultats du questionnaire administré auprès des organisateurs syndicaux, l'étude démontre que les syndicats ont changé leurs priorités et ont mis l'accent sur l'organisation des non-syndiqués dans les industries de services du secteur privé. Le nombre de demandes pour l'accréditation syndicale dans les industries de services du secteur privé est maintenant rendu au deuxième rang après le nombre de demandes dans le secteur de la construction. Ces demandes d'accréditation dans les industries de services du secteur privé ont augmenté en proportion des demandes totales en Ontario entre les années quatre-vingts et quatre-vingt-dix. Les taux de réussite dans le secteur sont comparables aux taux dans les autres secteurs, et le nombre d'employés syndiqués dans le secteur des services est en deuxième place après le nombre de travailleurs nouvellement syndiqués dans le secteur manufacturier.

Un changement dramatique dans la stratégie syndicale s'est manifesté par le fait que les syndicats industriels ont tenté d'organiser plus d'unités d'accréditation dans les industries de services du secteur privé que dans leur base traditionnelle dans le secteur manufacturier. Au sujet de la syndicalisation des femmes, les résultats du questionnaire montrent que les femmes ont une plus grande probabilité de devenir membres d'un syndicat que les hommes. Avec chaque augmentation d'un point de pourcentage dans le nombre des femmes dans l'unité d'accréditation, il y a une augmentation d'un point de pourcentage dans les chances que le syndicat a de gagner un vote d'accréditation. En dépit de ce fait, les syndicats continuent de concentrer la plus grande part de leurs efforts dans les tentatives de syndiquer les lieux de travail où la majorité d'employés sont des hommes.

La dernière section de l'article examine les résultats du questionnaire administré aux organisateurs syndicaux sur la question de l'impact des stratégies syndicales particulières sur la réussite des campagnes de syndicalisation. L'étude démontre que les stratégies intensives impliquant des militants de la base peuvent être liées à des taux de réussite plus élevés, ce qui confirme les conclusions du travail de Kate Bronfenbrenner sur les syndicats américains. En particulier, les chances de réussite du syndicat dans une campagne de syndicalisation augmentent d'une façon significative si le contact initial, avec l'unité d'accréditation, est établi par un membre du syndicat d'une autre unité d'accréditation, et quand les syndicats établissent des comités de syndicalisation à l'intérieur du lieu de travail.

L'étude conclut qu'en tant qu'acteurs stratégiques, les syndicats exercent une influence sur la destinée de leurs membres à travers leurs activités de syndicalisation. Les syndicats ont été motivés par une atmosphère de crise à développer leurs projets de syndicalisation et ces efforts, s'ils sont réunis avec des ressources accrues et des stratégies syndicales innovatrices, vont probablement avoir un effet positif en renversant le récent déclin et la stagnation du nombre de syndiqués.

# ***Staying the Decline in Union Membership***

## ***Union Organizing in Ontario, 1985–1999***

**CHARLOTTE A. B. YATES**

*In response to a sense of crisis precipitated by the 1995 election of the provincial Conservative government in Ontario and more anti-union employers, unions in Ontario have increased resources invested in and priority attached to organizing the unorganized. This article examines how unions have reoriented their organizing strategies to increase organizing effort in the private service sector and amongst women while at the same time experimenting with certain innovative rank-and-file intensive strategies that have significant positive effects on the outcome of organizing drives. The paper concludes that if unions follow through with this renewed commitment to organizing, they are likely to prevent a more serious membership crisis from erupting.*

Political developments in Ontario since the 1995 election of the Conservative government led by Mike Harris have not boded well for unions in that province. Ongoing changes to labour legislation designed to restrict the scope of union activity and the government's agenda for public sector restructuring and economic growth suggest that this government is determined to reduce union membership and influence. For many unions in the private sector, such as steel and textile unions, this changed political climate comes fast on the heels of industrial restructuring in the 1980s that left many union memberships decimated. After years of structural economic and political-legislative conditions which seemed to assure higher rates of union density in Ontario, and Canada more broadly, than those found in the United States, the ground has shifted beneath unions raising questions about the possible future of unions in Ontario, and

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ultimately in Canada. Statistics Canada data reinforces the urgency of these questions as it shows a gradual decline in Ontario union density since 1997, the first year for which comparable data is available (Akyeampong 1997, 1998, 1999).

Is membership in Canadian unions destined to follow lock step behind the experience of the United States and other countries? Is it possible that Canadian unions can reverse this recent decline and maintain their influence on the labour market and politics in this country? Where do we look for answers to these questions about the future of Canadian unions?

Most analysts of union membership in Canada and the United States have looked to changes in economic structure or legislation for answers to these questions. Without denying the importance of these factors, this article argues that to assess more completely the future of union membership in Canada we must also examine union organizing strategies aimed at membership recruitment. Unions are more than mere structural factors influencing the labour market. They are strategic actors (Katz and Kochan 1992; Scharpf 1997). In this capacity, union strategic choices and responses to structural and legislative changes may influence emergent trends in union density.

Focusing on experience in the province of Ontario, this article argues that in the face of a growing membership crisis and an increasingly hostile political-economic climate, unions have increased their investment in organizing and developed several innovative strategies to enhance success in recruitment. Innovations include reorientation to address the changing labour market, especially the growth in private service sector employment, and the use of selective rank-and-file intensive organizing strategies that have proven to have a significant positive effect on organizing success. These efforts at union renewal have no doubt prevented a more dramatic decline in union membership but have yet to rebuild union membership. The article concludes that if unions follow through with these strategic innovations they will likely reverse current trends in union membership. In short, what unions do and how they do it matters in determining future levels of union membership.

Although the focus of this analysis is Ontario, it offers more general insights into the future of unions in Canada. As the industrial heartland of Canada and the province with the largest population, success or failure of unions in Ontario has a significant impact on union strength in the country as a whole. Ontario is home to more than one third of the total employed labour force and of total union members in Canada. A significant drop in union membership in this province is therefore of great importance to national union density and labour's political, economic and social influence. Moreover, despite provincial differences, unions across Canada find

themselves confronted with common problems. Shifts in labour markets towards part-time, casual and service employment pose barriers to union recruitment across the country, as do more sophisticated anti-union employer strategies. Several provincial governments have implemented significant and similar changes to labour law meant to restrict the scope of union influence and impede the spread of unionization. Ontario therefore can be considered an important battleground over the future of the labour movement from which unions across Canada can learn either what to or what not to do in their bid to survive the current crisis in membership.

### ***PASSIVE AND ACTIVE REASONS FOR UNION MEMBERSHIP CHANGE***

With few exceptions (Riddell 1993; Chaison and Rose 1996; Lipset 1987, 1998; Martinello 2000), existing explanations for Canadian union density rest largely on external environmental and institutional factors and imply a limited role for unions as strategic actors in making a difference to union membership rates (Troy 1990; Galarneau 1996; Chaison and Rose 1990, 1991, 1996; O'Grady 1992; Thomason and Pozzebon 1998). Once Canadian institutions and structural conditions begin to converge around the model set by the United States, it is assumed that union memberships will follow suit. Unions become a constant variable in these analyses rather than strategic actors that adapt to and mediate the impact of external structural factors. Further, with few exceptions (Riddell 1993), the analysis of structural economic and labour market changes that underpin these arguments ignores the effect they may have on demand for union representation by workers. These two criticisms suggest that it is time to look more carefully at the role unions play in overcoming barriers to membership expansion and to see the structural economic and institutional factors, such as labour market change and labour laws, as constraints on union actions rather than primary determinants of union membership. Moreover, it is fruitful to look at union membership renewal, not just at union density, for answers to questions about union membership trends.

Distinguishing between passive and active reasons for union membership change is a useful conceptual tool for disaggregating the causes of union membership change. Passive change refers to those changes in the economy and workplaces that have an effect on union membership, whether positive or negative, but this effect is not the primary goal of the changes. For example, when a unionized company hires more workers to expand production, this change has the effect of increasing union membership although this was not the company's goal in expanding its workforce. Passive union membership change occurs for a multitude of reasons

including layoffs, plant closures, new hires (which accounted for large part of expansion of industrial unions in the 1960s) associated with expansion of unionized workplaces, retirement, technological change and work reorganization.

Active union membership change refers to those activities of employers, unions or governments that have as their primary goal an impact on union membership. This group of activities focus on strategic interventions by institutional parties to alter employment relationships. Active reasons for membership change include new certifications of bargaining units by unions, most often as a result of union organizing, decertification of unions whether as a result of employee dissatisfaction or employer sponsored anti-union drives and legislative changes by governments that seek to influence the process whereby unions represent groups of workers.

Breaking apart the study of union membership change in terms of passive and active measures offers two analytical advantages. First, this framework allows us to distinguish conceptually membership changes arising from structural change from those that arise from the strategic intervention in employment relations of the key parties to employment relations. Union membership is, and has long been, highly contested by employers, governments and unions. The last ten to twenty years have witnessed an increase in the contestation over union membership, fuelled by neo-liberal ideology, the drive to compete and 'expert' arguments that unions impede the flexible adjustment of firms and labour markets to new economic conditions (Panitch and Swartz 1993; McBride and Shields 1997; OECD 1994; Card and Freeman 1993; Piore and Sabel 1984). In this contest, unions are strategic actors as are employers and governments. By distinguishing passive from active means of union membership change, the contested nature of industrial relations, and especially union membership, is highlighted, therefore opening the way to more systematic examination of the impact of struggles between labour, management and government on union membership levels. This brings us to the second but related advantage of distinguishing passive from active membership change.

Since Kochan, Katz and McKersie's path-breaking book, *The Transformation of American Industrial Relations* (1986), the conceptualization of industrial relations as involving strategic actors and choices has become widespread. Strategic actors are defined as those actors that engage in purposeful action in pursuit of a chosen course of action. Strategic actors interact with one another, responding to and trying to anticipate one another's moves, in an effort to influence outcomes (Scharpf 1997). The outcome achieved, in this case reflected in union membership levels, is affected by the strategies of all the relevant actors. Whereas much of the literature on union membership trends readily acknowledges the strategic

role played by governments and employers in shaping union membership outcomes, it underestimates the strategic role played by unions. Yet, unions are strategic actors, albeit constrained in their actions and effectiveness by structural factors and the relative power of other actors, most notably governments and employers. A framework that distinguishes between passive and active reasons for union membership change, and accords unions a role as strategic actors, shifts the methodological approach to one that focuses on the strategic interventions of key actors and their interactions, seen in responses to real and anticipated actions by other parties. Even though this article does not address equally the strategies of all actors, focusing as it does on union organizing activity, this framework provides a means of situating unions as strategic actors and studying their organizing initiatives in light of actions taken by governments and employers.

Starting from this perspective, several questions about union organizing arise. Are unions increasing their membership recruitment activities and if so, are they being effective? Are unions continuing to concentrate their organizing activities in sectors of traditional union strength or are they adapting their recruitment strategies to respond to the growth in employment in new sectors and new types of work? If unions are being more effective in organizing new bargaining units and shifting their organizing priorities to growth areas in the economy, are these gains enough to counter measures by governments and employers to reduce union membership? Many of these questions have gained renewed importance in industrial relations literature as a result of research by Kate Bronfenbrenner and other American academics that demonstrates the positive effect that union strategy can have on union membership recruitment (Bronfenbrenner et al. 1998; Bronfenbrenner and Juravich 1998; Hurd 1998; Mantzios 1998).

We begin with a discussion of labour policy developments in Ontario since 1995 when the Conservative government took power. This discussion explores the negative effects of more restrictive legislation on union organizing as well as its emboldening of employers in their use of anti-union tactics. This is followed by a three part discussion of union organizing. The first section reviews evidence that demonstrates that unions have increased the priority attached to and the resources invested in organizing. The second section examines union responses to labour market changes, focusing on union organizing amongst women and in the private service sector. The third section discusses briefly some of the strategic innovations developed by unions to enhance their success in organizing the unorganized.

## ***METHODOLOGY***

This article is based on an ongoing five-year study of union organizing in Canada, with a particular focus on Ontario and British Columbia. The research combines qualitative and quantitative analysis, and is driven by a set of questions about union adaptation to a changing workforce and membership, with particular focus on union organizational and cultural change. The first stage of research used for this paper involves analysis of data from the Ontario Labour Relations Board (OLRB) on union certifications for the eighteen-year period when detailed information is available. Certification applications disposed by the OLRB are used as an indicator of the level of union organizing activity while certification applications won and as a proportion of total disposed indicate the level of union success.<sup>1</sup> Certification applications are a reasonably accurate indicator of union organizing. Only a small proportion of these applications involve displacement activity, i.e. raids of one union by another. Compensating for the effect of raids on these numbers are voluntary recognitions. OLRB certification data does not include cases where unionization was achieved through voluntary recognition, a process which is increasingly common in parts of the retail trade and construction industries.<sup>2</sup> In fact, certification applications that end in voluntary recognition are often withdrawn by the union and counted in statistics as losses. This research has been supplemented by information gathered through interviews, policy papers and union data on selected unions.

The second ongoing phase of the research involves a large-scale survey of union organizers involved in all applications for certification in Ontario and British Columbia for a two-year period. This part of the study is modelled on work undertaken by Kate Bronfenbrenner at Cornell University (Bronfenbrenner and Juravich 1998) and is aimed at assessing the effect of different union organizing strategies as well as workplace and employer characteristics on success or failure of applications for certification. In Ontario, surveys for 1281 certification applications (over 80% of total) in

1. Using certification applications as an indicator of union organizing activity under-reports the actual level of union organizing activity since it does not count organizing drives that did not result in an application to the OLRB, whether because of failure on the union's part to achieve the desired level of membership support to make such an application "winable," or withdrawal of the application due to acceptance by the employer of voluntary recognition. However, data based on certification applications is the only reliable and consistent source available for measuring union organizing activity.
2. In several cases involving the construction industry, cases are reported as withdrawn from OLRB consideration because the employer has agreed to a voluntary recognition of the bargaining unit. This information comes from my survey administered to organizers in Ontario for cases at the OLRB between September 1, 1996 to August 31, 1998.

the period from September 1, 1996 to August 31, 1998 were sent to union organizers who were primarily responsible for the organizing drive resulting in the certification application; 677 surveys or 52.8% of the total population were returned completed. Of those surveys returned, 39 or 5.8% of the population were raids. There was a slight non-reporting bias amongst employee associations and small, non-affiliated unions, most of which were recorded as having one or two applications for certification.

### ***A NEW REGIME OF LABOUR LAW IN ONTARIO***

The 1995 election of Mike Harris's Conservative government in Ontario marked an about face in labour policy and the role of the public sector in the province. Almost immediately upon taking office, the Conservative government rescinded union-friendly labour laws that had been introduced two years earlier by a New Democratic Party (NDP) government, and replaced these with a body of law aimed at restricting union membership (Jain and Muthu 1996). Perhaps the single most dramatic change was the replacement of the card-based system of union certification with mandatory votes, to be administered on an expedited basis within five days of the application for certification. Decertification of unions was eased with the lowering of the membership threshold for decertification applications. An organizing ban was introduced that prevents unions from reorganizing a workplace and reapplying for certification within twelve months of a failed or withdrawn application. No such restrictions are placed on decertification applications. The number of groups of workers excluded from coverage by unions was also expanded, having the immediate effect of making null and void union coverage and collective agreements for agricultural workers and certain professional groups. More recently, welfare recipients who are required to work in order to gain welfare benefits have been banned from joining unions. Finally, in the aftermath of the OLRB order to certify the United Steelworkers of America (USWA) as the bargaining agent for a Windsor Wal-Mart store in response to unfair labour practices by the employer, the government introduced Bill 31 in 1998 (Sack, Goldblatt and Mitchell 1998). This law stripped the OLRB of its remedial powers to grant bargaining rights to a union without demonstrated majority support in workplaces where the employer has created "a coercive atmosphere in which the true wishes of the employees concerning union representation are unlikely to be ascertained" (Arthurs et al. 1993: 204). Proposed changes to laws covering the construction industry will further curtail union organizing.

Policy changes to broader labour market regulations accompanied those to industrial relations law, including termination of employment equity



laws, restructuring of Worker's Compensation and Occupational Health and Safety Legislation, freezing of minimum wage provisions and, most recently, proposed reductions in employment standards protections for individual workers. The Conservative government also vigorously pursued its goal of reducing the public sector through contracting out, privatization and massive lay offs (Shields and Evans 1998; Swimmer and Thompson 1995).

Three effects of these legislative and policy initiatives have particular significance for an analysis of union organizing. First, these policies accelerated changes to Ontario's labour market, especially reducing and facilitating the restructuring public sector employment. These labour market changes are likely to have the long-term effect of eroding union membership in the public sector and increasing those employed in private service and non-standard forms of employment.

Second, these legislative changes have created a more hostile environment for unions in which employers have greater latitude in their dealings with unions and face weaker penalties for unfair or illegal activities in the area of employment relations. Existing literature on anti-union employer behaviour is divided between those that maintain that employers operating in Canada are as hostile in their dealings with unions as their counterparts in the United States (Saporta and Lincoln 1995; Bentham 1999) and those that argue that "employer resistance to unions in Canada is not as extensive or intense as in the United States" (Chaison and Rose 1991: 182; see also Card and Freeman 1993). Interviews with heads of several union organizing departments and survey data from Ontario organizers offer persuasive evidence that employers have become more aggressive in their resistance to unions since the election of the Conservative government. Several organizers reported that employers promised or actually changed conditions of employment (acts that constitute illegal activity according to the Ontario Labour Relations Act) in the five-day period between the application and vote for certification, including increasing wages and offering additional paid holidays to employees, or threatened employees with loss of their job or workplace/company closure in the event of a pro-union vote.<sup>3</sup> These employer practices seem especially evident in the construction sector and have increased with the passage of Bill 31. In a ruling on unfair labour practices in the case of the *International Brotherhood of Painters and Allied Trades (local 1891) vs K.L. Drywall and Acoustics*, OLRB Vice-Chair J. Johnson wrote: "I have no

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3. See also *Bulletin* by Construction Trades Council of Toronto, February 2000 which documents several cases of unfair labour practices by employers since the introduction of Bill 31.

difficulty in concluding that the employer in this case has blatantly violated section 70, 72 and 76 of the Act. Had the legislature not enacted Bill 31, this would have been a case in which it was appropriate to certify the union...." (OLRB 1999).

Thirdly, and finally, Conservative government changes to labour law have had a negative effect on organizing attempts and organizing success. Evidence of this decline in organizing comes from two sources. The first are descriptive statistics based on OLRB certification data presented in Table 1 and the second is Felice Martinello's (2000) analysis of the impact of labour law under the NDP and Conservative governments.

The first columns of Table 1 give certification data for all of Ontario between 1981 and 1999. After several years of fluctuating results, more decisive patterns appear in the aftermath of 1993 when the NDP introduced pro-labour law reforms with Bill 40. In 1992/93, a period which corresponds to the first year of NDP government, certification applications to the Board reached record lows. Martinello (2000) explains this as being the effect of anticipated labour law reform on union behaviour. Union expectations of imminent labour law reform by the NDP government had the effect of altering union behaviour, causing unions to hold off on submitting their applications for certification until new more supportive labour laws were in place. For the two-year period when this labour law reform was in place, 1993/94 and 1994/95, certification applications increased, success rates reached an all-time high and numbers of employees organized peaked in 1994/95 at 32,116. This period of successful organizing activity came to an abrupt end when the Conservative government took office in 1995, rescinding NDP labour law reforms and implementing changes discussed in the previous section on labour policy. In the period of Conservative labour law reform (1995–1999) applications for certification, both disposed of and granted dropped to their lowest levels in the period under investigation, as did success rates. The only bright spot for unions in this period came in 1998–99 when 27,299 employees were organized.

Martinello's analysis of the impact of political and labour law regimes under the NDP and Conservative governments substantiates the initial impressions from Table 1 of the decisive impact of labour law and political climate on union organizing activity. Martinello examines monthly data on union certifications in Ontario between 1987 and 1998, regressing this data on "political and legal dummy variables and variables controlling for seasonal factors, the overall level of economic activity and the free trade agreements" (Martinello 2000: 19). Martinello reaches four major conclusions with regards to the effect of labour law change on union organizing (see Martinello 2000: 26–30). First, certification activity increased significantly after NDP labour law reforms took effect. Second, when Bill 7

TABLE 1  
Certifications in Ontario by Sector

Fiscal Year	Labour Law Regime	Ontario <sup>1</sup>			Health/Welfare					
		Certifications Applications <sup>2</sup>	Grant	Success Rate <sup>3</sup>	Number of Employees	Certifications Applications <sup>2</sup>	Grant	Success Rate <sup>3</sup>	% of Total Applications <sup>4</sup>	Number of Employees
1981/82		1101	716	65.0%	20,031	155	115	74.2%	14%	n.a.
1982/83		767	514	67.0%	14,272	124	91	73.4%	16%	n.a.
1983/84		817	555	67.9%	17,043	105	79	75.2%	13%	n.a.
1984/85		985	673	68.3%	24,997	148	120	81.1%	15%	n.a.
1985/86		1034	704	68.1%	22,937	144	115	79.9%	14%	4,071
1986/87		1006	655	65.1%	23,536	143	104	72.7%	14%	4,083
1987/88		1108	750	67.7%	27,085	122	107	87.7%	11%	3,793
1988/89		944	649	68.8%	21,440	147	117	79.6%	16%	4,770
1989/90		880	573	65.1%	17,184	114	90	78.9%	13%	2,805
1990/91		773	511	66.1%	20,552	126	101	80.2%	16%	3,795
1991/92		987	660	66.9%	20,831	148	107	72.3%	15%	4,180
1992/93	NDP	743	509	68.5%	14,820	125	102	81.6%	17%	2,828
1993/94	NDP	1135	829	73.0%	25,798	141	116	82.3%	12%	4,082
1994/95	NDP	987	762	77.2%	32,116	147	122	83.0%	15%	4,784
1995/96	PC	759	510	67.2%	20,564	141	119	84.4%	19%	4,331
1996/97	PC	656	387	59.0%	21,496	111	85	76.6%	17%	8,392
1997/98	PC	664	424	63.9%	21,049	107	79	73.8%	16%	4,060
1998/99	PC	665	414	62.3%	27,299	110	82	74.5%	17%	4,006
Total		16,011	10,795	67.4%	316,707	2,358	1851	78.5%	15%	59,980

TABLE 1  
Certification in Ontario by Sector (continued)

Fiscal Year	Education				Private Service Sector <sup>5</sup>			
	Certifications		% of Total Applications <sup>4</sup>	Number of Employees	Certifications <sup>2</sup>		% of Total Applications <sup>4</sup>	Number of Employees
	Applications <sup>2</sup>	Grant	Success Rate <sup>3</sup>		Applications <sup>2</sup>	Grant	Success Rate <sup>3</sup>	
1981/82	43	34	79.1%	n.a.	200	124	62.0%	n.a.
1982/83	25	14	56.0%	n.a.	n.a. <sup>6</sup>	n.a. <sup>6</sup>	n.a.	n.a.
1983/84	19	12	63.2%	n.a.	160	99	61.9%	n.a.
1984/85	37	27	73.0%	n.a.	241	133	55.2%	n.a.
1985/86	57	31	54.4%	1,411	249	159	63.9%	n.a.
1986/87	70	45	64.3%	4,997	155	97	62.6%	5,419
1987/88	86	47	54.7%	4,879	136	88	64.7%	2,559
1988/89	54	41	75.9%	2,910	124	85	68.5%	2,203
1989/90	97	48	49.5%	2,475	116	83	71.6%	2,247
1990/91	56	42	75.0%	3,244	160	92	57.5%	1,659
1991/92	51	50	98.0%	4,755	186	121	65.1%	2,493
1992/93 <sup>7</sup>	46	33	71.7%	1,877	204	153	75.0%	3,792
1993/94 <sup>7</sup>	29	28	96.6%	2,415	547	401	73.3%	5,304
1994/95 <sup>7</sup>	38	32	84.2%	2,801	392	307	78.3%	9,217
1995/96 <sup>8</sup>	29	24	82.8%	3,789	259	173	66.8%	12,839
1996/97 <sup>8</sup>	23	16	69.6%	1,753	173	97	56.1%	5,549
1997/98 <sup>8</sup>	49	39	79.6%	4,641	207	133	64.3%	4,298
1998/99 <sup>8</sup>	29	20	69.0%	7,213	177	113	63.8%	7,360
Total	838	583	69.6%	49,160	3,686	2,458	66.7%	3,981
			5%				23%	68,920

TABLE 1 (continued)

Fiscal Year	Manufacturing				Construction			
	Certifications		% of Total Applications <sup>4</sup>	Number of Employees	Certifications		Success Rate <sup>3</sup>	% of Total Applications <sup>4</sup>
	Applications <sup>2</sup>	Grant			Applications <sup>2</sup>	Grant		
1981/82	224	145	64.7%	20%	345	211	61.2%	31%
1982/83	159	105	66.0%	21%	231	150	64.9%	30%
1983/84	211	160	75.8%	26%	248	153	61.7%	30%
1984/85	231	169	73.2%	23%	224	156	69.6%	23%
1985/86	272	182	66.9%	26%	199	130	65.3%	19%
1986/87	280	193	68.9%	28%	248	159	64.1%	25%
1987/88	273	178	65.2%	25%	375	257	68.5%	34%
1988/89	212	149	70.3%	22%	324	208	64.2%	34%
1989/90	165	104	63.0%	19%	285	183	64.2%	32%
1990/91	158	105	66.5%	20%	221	138	62.4%	29%
1991/92	149	91	61.1%	15%	398	251	63.1%	40%
1992/93 <sup>7</sup>	111	75	67.6%	15%	202	113	55.9%	27%
1993/94 <sup>7</sup>	139	103	74.1%	12%	191	118	61.8%	17%
1994/95 <sup>7</sup>	154	117	76.0%	16%	185	132	71.4%	19%
1995/96 <sup>8</sup>	127	73	57.5%	17%	141	85	60.3%	19%
1996/97 <sup>8</sup>	114	68	59.6%	17%	185	90	48.6%	28%
1997/98 <sup>8</sup>	105	68	64.8%	16%	153	76	49.7%	23%
1998/99 <sup>8</sup>	127	71	55.9%	19%	145	70	48.3%	22%
Total	3211	2156	67.1%	20%	4300	2680	62.3%	27%
								16,491

Source: Ontario Labour Relations Board Annual Reports, Various Years. Employees by sector not reported until 1985-86.

<sup>1</sup> Data for reported sectors does not add up to Ontario totals. Sectors not disaggregated include transportation, storage, wholesale trade, electric, gas and water, local and other government, mining and quarrying, forestry, religious organizations.

<sup>2</sup> Refers to total number of applications disposed by the OLRB, rather than total certification applications submitted by union.

<sup>3</sup> Success rate calculated as number of certifications granted as percentage of total certification applications disposed.

<sup>4</sup> This column reports applications disposed in particular sector as percentage of total applications disposed in Ontario in that fiscal year.

<sup>5</sup> Private Service Sector indicator calculated by combining data on retail trade, finance and insurance, real estate, management services, accommodation and food services.

<sup>6</sup> Accurate data not available due to errors in OLRB reporting.

<sup>7</sup> Labour law regime: NDP.

<sup>8</sup> Labour law regime: PC.

took effect, organizing attempts and success rates declined significantly. Although changes to the certification procedure “likely accounted for the decrease in the certification success rate but the larger effect seemed to be the discouragement of organizing attempts” seen in the reduced numbers of applications for certification. Third, decertification activity increased significantly under Bill 7. Finally, the effects of Bill 7 were much greater than the effects of NDP labour law reform.

Overall, it seems reasonable to conclude that the election of a Conservative government has erected both legal hurdles to organizing and created a hostile anti-union political climate in which employers oppose unions even harder, both of which have significant negative effects on union organizing. Yet, this is not the end of the story. After an initial year of shock and disorientation, unions have determined that they must prevent membership haemorrhaging by prioritizing organizing and experimenting with innovative tactics for organizing the unorganized.

### ***SHIFTING PRIORITIES: ORGANIZING BECOMES JOB 1***

In contrast to the experience of Britain, the United States and Australia where central labour federations have taken a leading role in organizing the unorganized (Bronfenbrenner et al. 1998: 1–15; Heery 2000a, 2000b; Griffin, Svensen and Small 2001), central labour federations in Canada do not have the power to spearhead organizing initiatives (OFL 1997). Individual unions play the key strategic role in organizing the unorganized and it is to a study of them that we now turn.

Dozens of unions in Ontario report that they have increased the priority they attach to organizing over the last decade and in particular over the last five years. Data for six unions, identified as some of the most important unions operating in Ontario according to organizing effort, success and strategic importance for various sectors are reported in Table 2. These six unions organized 45% of the total employees organized in Ontario for the period under study and represent workers across several sectors.

All of the six unions report that they have increased their commitment to organizing in the last five to ten years, although the United Steelworkers of America (USWA) and Canadian Autoworkers (CAW) made initial commitments to organizing in the mid 1980s.<sup>4</sup> Evidence of this increased commitment to organizing can be found in formal policy or executive commitments to increase the priority of and resources available for organizing (USWA 1984, 1988, 1998; CAW 1997a; CUPE 1993; Yates 1998; Cartwright 2000; Neath 1995, 1996, 2000; Crawford 2000; see also Witt and Wilson 1998) and the greater emphasis placed on organizing in union publications (UFCW 1994; USWA 1998; CUPE 1996; IBT 1992-96). In

TABLE 2  
Certifications in Ontario by Union

Fiscal Year	CUPE				UFCW			
	Certifications		Number of Employees	Average Unit Size	Certifications		Success Rate <sup>2</sup>	Number of Employees
	Applications <sup>1</sup>	Grant			Applications <sup>1</sup>	Grant		
1981-82	88	70	n.a.	n.a.	55	45	82%	n.a.
1982-83	67	41	n.a.	n.a.	33	28	85%	n.a.
1983-84	54	39	n.a.	n.a.	40	29	73%	n.a.
1984-85	73	53	n.a.	n.a.	61	32	52%	n.a.
1985-86	70	51	2133	42	84	47	56%	36
1986-87	76	57	2158	38	54	35	65%	41
1987-88	63	45	2941	65	46	29	63%	884
1988-89	46	36	1677	47	33	24	73%	898
1989-90	59	42	1413	34	33	23	70%	483
1990-91	49	40	2102	53	31	27	87%	950
1991-92	59	44	2602	59	43	24	56%	825
1992-93 <sup>4</sup>	47	34	882	26	50	36	72%	1358
1993-94 <sup>4</sup>	68	57	2419	42	43	34	79%	1400
1994-95 <sup>4</sup>	78	59	2181	37	92	73	79%	2633
1995-96 <sup>5</sup>	63	49	1245	25	69	45	65%	2043
1996-97 <sup>5</sup>	40	30	5282	176	59	36	61%	1131
1997-98 <sup>5</sup>	50	39	2832	73	56	41	73%	2039
1998-99 <sup>5</sup>	58	43	6269	146	41	27	66%	1227
Total	1108	829	36136	44	923	635	69%	18987

TABLE 2  
Certifications in Ontario by Union (continued)

Fiscal Year	CAW <sup>a</sup>				UFCW			
	Certifications		Number of Employees	Average Unit Size	Certifications		Success Rate <sup>b</sup>	Average Unit Size
	Applications <sup>1</sup>	Grant			Applications <sup>1</sup>	Grant		
1981-82	11	4	n.a.	n.a.	59	40	68%	n.a.
1982-83	13	10	n.a.	n.a.	23	14	61%	n.a.
1983-84	29	25	n.a.	n.a.	33	20	61%	n.a.
1984-85	38	29	n.a.	n.a.	46	36	78%	n.a.
1985-86	45	29	1446	50	70	50	71%	52
1986-87	35	29	2398	83	64	46	72%	50
1987-88	30	23	2041	89	83	51	61%	31
1988-89	44	36	3744	104	60	42	70%	49
1989-90	34	25	4132	165	48	34	71%	47
1990-91	37	23	4037	176	58	23	40%	62
1991-92	17	13	1910	147	40	28	70%	66
1992-93 <sup>4</sup>	21	14	625	45	34	22	65%	69
1993-94 <sup>4</sup>	67	49	2451	50	122	86	70%	36
1994-95 <sup>4</sup>	54	46	9158	199	85	70	82%	46
1995-96 <sup>5</sup>	39	25	1843	74	57	39	68%	68
1996-97 <sup>5</sup>	31	15	958	64	52	30	58%	75
1997-98 <sup>5</sup>	27	17	903	53	52	33	63%	92
1998-99 <sup>5</sup>	45	23	2684	117	49	32	65%	229
Total	617	435	38330	88	1035	696	67%	52



TABLE 2 (continued)

Fiscal Year	UBCJA				Teamsters			
	Certifications		Number of Employees	Average Unit Size	Certifications		Success Rate <sup>2</sup>	Number of Employees
	Applications <sup>1</sup>	Grant			Applications <sup>1</sup>	Grant		
1981-82	131	89	n.a.	n.a.	66	47	71%	n.a.
1982-83	88	56	n.a.	n.a.	35	27	77%	n.a.
1983-84	82	49	n.a.	n.a.	34	27	79%	n.a.
1984-85	72	47	n.a.	n.a.	72	47	65%	n.a.
1985-86	45	26	500	19	56	42	75%	734
1986-87	43	25	340	14	37	29	78%	584
1987-88	107	83	472	6	36	22	61%	699
1988-89	68	33	332	10	58	36	62%	558
1989-90	77	46	463	10	43	27	63%	798
1990-91	42	27	331	12	31	17	55%	869
1991-92	46	20	231	12	32	22	69%	481
1992-93 <sup>4</sup>	32	15	85	6	27	22	81%	306
1993-94 <sup>4</sup>	29	14	79	6	43	31	72%	1944
1994-95 <sup>4</sup>	29	13	625	48	44	36	82%	826
1995-96 <sup>5</sup>	20	13	90	7	49	31	63%	556
1996-97 <sup>5</sup>	45	22	155	7	30	19	63%	591
1997-98 <sup>5</sup>	50	22	189	9	29	16	55%	497
1998-99 <sup>5</sup>	31	17	134	8	40	27	68%	696
Total	1037	617	4026	7	762	525	69%	10139

Source: Ontario Labour Relations Board Annual Reports, Various Years. Employee numbers by union not reported until 1985-86.

<sup>1</sup> Refers to total number of applications disposed by the OLRB, rather than total certification applications submitted by union.

<sup>2</sup> Success rate calculated as number of certifications granted as percentage of total certification applications disposed.

<sup>3</sup> From 1981-82 to 1985-86, data is reported for United Automobile Workers, Canada (UAW). Thereafter, data is for CAW.

<sup>4</sup> Labour law regime: NDP.

<sup>5</sup> Labour law regime: PC.

1996, Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) went so far as to change the name of its national union publication to *Organize* in an effort to better publicize and mobilize its membership behind the union's goal of organizing the unorganized, as well as the organized.

Recruiting new members is expensive. USWA District 3 (Western Canada) estimates that it costs the union \$700 per member organized (Neuman 1999). An important indicator of increased union commitment to organizing can be found in the resources allocated to organizing. Information on union spending on organizing is uneven, and rarely disaggregated for Ontario. Yet, there is sufficient evidence to conclude that unions have increased their investment in organizing. In 1988, the USWA International committed 3% of dues collected to organizing which generated \$7 million per year. An additional \$6 million per year was allocated to organizing from the General Fund, bringing the total organizing expenditure to \$13 million. In 1998, the USWA increased its targeted organizing expenditures to \$40 million per year (a threefold increase) which was achieved by committing 20% of its General Fund to organizing and encouraging locals to spend 10% of their resources on organizing (USWA 1998: 25–26). The USWA's goal is to organize annually a number of workers equal to 10% of its current membership. CAW resources allocated to organizing have fluctuated over the years, reaching as high as 30% of total budgetary expenditures in selected years between 1985 and 1997 (CAW Executive Board Trustees and National Secretary Treasurer, selected years). In an effort to achieve the twin goals of stabilizing year to year and increasing resources available for organizing, the CAW in 1997 agreed to divert to organizing 2% of total union dues, which stand at about \$100 million per year (CAW 1997a: 9; Gindin 2000). This increases the resources invested in organizing by \$2 million per year. In 1993, CUPE, which had only sporadically targeted money to organizing, began diverting money from its National Defence fund into organizing. In 1997, the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America (UBCJA) General Executive declared that 50% of all resources at each level of the union should be directed towards organizing (Cartwright 2000). In 1992, when Teamsters for a Democratic Union took over control of the union, one of the leadership's first priorities was to increase organizing (IBT 1995). Evidence of this came with the establishment in 1992 of a Special Organizing Fund with over \$26 million in funding (IBT 1996). Both the Teamsters and UFCW report that it is impossible to calculate monies spent on organizing in Canada, or Ontario, due to the significant resources allocated to organizing by locals and the flow of resources back and forth across the border.

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4. The USWA in Canada lost 55,000 members between 1980 and 1983 due to layoffs and closures in the steel and mining industries (Government of Canada, selected years).

The number of organizing staff employed by a union is yet another indicator of union organizing. In 1988 when the USWA passed its "Future Directions" Report, District 6 which is dominated by Ontario had no organizing coordinator or full-time staff. Within a year of this report, District 6 hired one staff organizer. By 1996 this number had risen to six full-time organizers (James 1996). The biggest increase to CAW staff came immediately following the split with the International Union when up to ten additional organizers were hired. Largely as a result of resources from the Defence fund, by August 2000, the CUPE Ontario Regional office had doubled its full-time organizing staff from two to four. This does not take into account the increased role played by CUPE service staff and local leaders in organizing campaigns who often identify unorganized workplaces and launch campaigns with a limited role for the full-time organizing staff (Blackadder 2000). Since 1990, the UFCW has seen more than a threefold increase in the staff employed as organizers. In 1990, only one local in the UFCW in Ontario employed full-time organizers and it employed three organizers in this year. In 2000, the UFCW had three locals with full-time organizers and the number of organizers had increased to ten (Neath 2000). Since the change in Teamsters leadership, a National Organizing Office was established in Canada with two full-time organizers (an increase from zero in 1992). This does not account for the Teamster locals which have hired their own organizers for which detailed information is unavailable (Crawford 2000).

All of the six unions have further increased their organizing presence on the ground by training rank-and-file members to organize. These casual or part-time organizers are trained, and then periodically assigned to organizing, sometimes on a volunteer basis but most often with time off the job paid by the union. Once their organizing assignment is complete, these workers return to their workplaces. One of the first unions to train and deploy rank-and-file organizers was the UFCW which began this practice in the early 1990s. The UFCW has trained, at a cost of more than \$2 million, approximately 100 Special Project Union Representatives (SPURs) who are rank-and-file organizers who recruit members in workplaces, sectors or amongst employers in which the organizer has some experience (Neath 1995, 1996, 2000; UFCW 1994). Since the early 1990s, the CAW has trained over 100 rank-and-file members as "community based organizers" to work in their local communities in establishing organizing contacts and working alongside staff organizers in campaigns. In 1996, the USWA District 6 reported that it trained approximately 45 "casual" organizers per year (James 1996), a number that will increase with the International USWA's 1998 decision to train more volunteer organizers (USWA 1998).

The UBCJA is perhaps the most recent to get its training of rank-and-file organizers off the ground, and has some of the most ambitious

plans. In 1995, the UBCJA adopted the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers' (IBEW) education programme, entitled Construction Organizing Membership Education and Training (COMET). Developed as a two-stage education programme, COMET I seeks to shift union members' attitudes away from restrictive membership practices towards an understanding of the importance of membership recruitment (COMET 2000; Grabelsky et al. 1999). COMET II, developed somewhat later, trains union members in organizing strategies, highlighting in particular a strategy known as "salting" where union members are encouraged to seek work in non-union firms in order to build an inside organizing committee and eventually achieve union certification. Although the UBCJA has trained dozens of workers with COMET, it has recently increased its commitment to COMET as it lays the groundwork for requiring that every new member of the UBCJA go through COMET training (Pimentel 2000).

The question remains as to whether greater commitment to **and investment** in organizing by unions has translated into greater organizing effort (measured by total number of applications for certification) and improved success. Table 2 reports total certification applications disposed of and granted with success rates and average unit size for each of the six unions. Not surprisingly, the patterns in organizing activity by individual unions across time are uneven. No one would expect a direct relationship between increased spending and increased effort and success, particularly as government and employer actions also influence certification application outcomes. Some of the data does require more careful examination, however. If we compare individual union effort (Table 2) to total union efforts in Ontario (Table 1), we see some slight variations in the aftermath of Conservative labour legislation. Although CUPE applications to the OLRB declined with the passage of Bill 7, they have gone up in the last two years. CUPE success rates have remained comparable to the period prior to the NDP's election. Moreover, the years since the Conservatives took power represent banner years for CUPE in terms of numbers of workers organized, something that no doubt reflects the union's aggressive organizing in the aftermath of municipal and health care restructuring. Like other unions, USWA applications to the OLRB dropped after the passage of Bill 7 but have remained steady in the three years since the Conservative election. USWA has also succeeded in organizing a higher number of workers on average each year since the Conservative election, than the average annual number of workers organized for the decade prior to the NDP's election. This holds true even if we exclude from the calculations of the average, numbers of workers organized in 1998–99 which were especially high due, in large part, to one campaign that led to the certification of over 5,000 staff at the University of Toronto.

The only other individual union results which require special discussion are those for the CAW. Besides its organizing success during the years of NDP government, a pattern evident for most unions with the exception of the UBCJA, the CAW's banner organizing years occurred in the late 1980s immediately after the break with its International union when the union made a commitment to build a national union, in part through organizing. These successes correspond to a period when the CAW targeted auto parts plants for organizing, a sector in which the union already had a strong and credible presence, and in which it was able to make significant inroads with organizing success at large parts manufacturers such as A.G. Simpson. But the CAW has had a dismal organizing record since the Conservative election, with lower success rates than the provincial average and some of the most dramatic declines in workers organized of any union in Ontario. This is in spite of greater commitment to organizing by the CAW. Although many factors contributed to the CAW's recent poor record in organizing, it is likely that one of the most important factors contributing to this poor organizing record was an organizational transition that took place in the CAW's organizing department which prevented efficient allocation of resources and effective strategic responses to opportunities. As these internal problems show signs of being resolved and considerable additional resources have been pumped into organizing since 1998, the CAW seems to be turning its performance around. Between 1997-88 and 1998-99, the CAW increased its certification applications from 27 to 45 and almost tripled the number of workers organized, although its success rate remained low at 51%.

Although unions cannot recruit more members without increased investment of time and resources, resources alone are not sufficient to address a growing membership crisis. Union strategy shapes how these resources are invested, and becomes crucial in whether increased investment is likely to reap increased membership rewards. The next two sections discuss two aspects of union strategy: union strategic responses to the changing labour market and evidence of shifts in organizing strategies employed by unions.

### ***ADAPTING TO A NEW LABOUR MARKET***

In the last ten to fifteen years, Canada's labour market has changed dramatically. The most noticeable changes have been: (1) a dramatic rise in employment in the private service sector, including in privatized sections of the public service such as nursing homes, with an attendant decline in the manufacturing and public sectors, (2) the proliferation of non-standard forms of work, including part-time, casual, contract and self-employment

and (3) the diversification of the workforce, seen in the continued increased participation of women and people of colour active in the paid labour market (Yalnizyan 1998; Lowe, Schellenberg and Davidman 1999; Shields and Burke 1999). For unions, this means that the workforces that have hitherto constituted the core of union memberships are in decline. To restore union membership numbers, unions therefore need to organize more diverse groups of workers, including more women and people of colour, and those employed in the private service sector and non-standard employment.

A review of union policies, public pronouncements and internal documents, as well as interviews with directors of organizing for several unions, indicate a clear recognition by unions of their need to change in order to recruit new groups of workers and respond to the changing labour market (CUPE 1993, 1995; CAW 1997a; Neath 1995, 1996; UFCW 1994). A comprehensive discussion of union strategic responses to the challenges of a changing labour force and market are beyond the scope of this paper, partly due to matters of space and partly due to lack of available data. Two areas of change will be examined below. The first is the strategic shift by unions in favour of organizing in the private service sector. The second is a brief look at how and if organizing strategies respond to the presence of a growing number of women in the labour force.

### ***ORGANIZING IN THE PRIVATE SERVICE SECTOR***

Many analysts have accused the union movement of failing to respond to changes in the labour market, most notably pointing to their failure to represent workers in the private service sector where union density rates ranged in 1995 from 2% in the finance sector to highs of 8.1% in accommodation, food and beverage and 12.9% in retail (Mainville and Olineck 1999: 19). Failure to shift priorities and organize in the private service sector where the bulk of job creation in Ontario is taking place (Shields and Burke 1999) could be disastrous for unions in the future. Yet data on union organizing suggests that unions are quickly adjusting their goals and strategies in order to organize in this sector. This is in spite of significant obstacles including high employee turnover, small sized workplaces over which managers can exercise personal control and an industry structure which feeds intense competition between different workplaces and erects structural advantages to employers with considerable resources at their disposal.

Table 1 breaks down certification data by sector. Looking at applications for certification disposed by the OLRB as an indicator of union organizing activity, the largest number of total applications for the period under investigation is found in the construction sector. The second largest number of applications for certification disposed is evident in the private

service sector, followed by the manufacturing sector. In terms of numbers of employees organized by sector, organizing in the private service sector accounted for the second largest number of employees organized, second only to the manufacturing sector. These findings on the high level of organizing undertaken in the private service sector contradicts the conclusions of many analysts that unions have not prioritized organizing in the private service sector. Further, success rates of union organizing in the private service sector are comparable to those for the province as a whole and, over the last ten years, to success rates for organizing in the manufacturing sector. This suggests either that the barriers to union organizing in the private service sector have been overstated or that unions have adapted their strategies successfully to overcome these barriers.

To get a clearer picture of shifts in union organizing priorities between sectors it is useful to look at certification applications disposed in each sector as a proportion of total certification applications disposed for the province as a whole. This figure, which is reported in the fourth column of data for each sector in Table 1, can be used as an indicator of relative organizing effort in each sector.

Comparing proportions of certifications applications between sectors, Health and Welfare and Education, reveal fairly constant rates of union organizing effort. The most significant trends in union organizing effort are revealed in the manufacturing, construction and private service sectors. Manufacturing accounted for an average of 23% of applications disposed between 1981–82 and 1989–90 compared to an average of 16% between 1990–91 and 1998–99. This indicates a clear decline in organizing effort in the manufacturing sector, something which is consistent with labour market trends and union strategy. There has also been a relative decline in union organizing effort in the construction sector. Construction has long been noted by the OLRB as being one of the sectors with the greatest level of union organizing activity. On average, the construction sector accounts for the highest level of union organizing effort with 27% of all applications disposed in Ontario for the period under study. Yet, there are noticeable differences between the 1980s and 1990s in union organizing effort measured as the proportion of applications disposed in the construction sector. Whereas construction accounted for an average of 28.7% of total applications disposed between 1981–82 and 1989–90, this sector dropped to an average of 24.8% between 1990–92 and 1998–99. Recent commitments to greater organizing by unions in the construction sector is likely to boost these figures on union effort.

Organizing in the private service sector reveals quite the opposite trends observed in the manufacturing and construction sectors. Whereas the private service sector accounted for an average of 17.3% of total applications

in Ontario for the period between 1981–82 and 1989–90, this rose dramatically in the 1990s to an average 30.3% of total certification applications for the period of 1990–91 to 1998–99. In 1993–94, a staggering 48% of all certification applications by unions were made for workplaces in the private service sector! These figures demonstrate that union organizing in the private sector has shifted quite dramatically from traditional areas of union strength, namely manufacturing and the construction industry, to the growth areas of the economy, namely the private service sector.

An examination of which unions are organizing in the private service sector further underscores the strategic shifts taking place within the union movement. Industrial unions have been the most aggressive in expanding their jurisdictional scope, especially in the private service sector and parts of the para-public sector (USWA 1998; Yates 2001). For example, the USWA has expanded its scope to include security guards, health care workers and white-collar workers while the CAW has in the last five years organized a casino, hotels and restaurants. Data from the Ontario survey of union organizers confirm this trend. Results from the survey reveal that only 31.9% of organizing drives by industrial unions were in the manufacturing sector, compared to 43.9% in the private service sector.

From this discussion of union organizing in the private service sector, we can draw two conclusions. First, growth in employment in the private service sector presents challenges to but is not the Achilles heel of the labour movement as many predicted. Second, unions have adapted their organizing strategies to meet the needs of growing numbers of workers employed in the service sector, a shift which suggests that unions may yet stave off a more serious crisis in union membership.

### *Unions Organizing Women*

There is a wealth of research on unions and women in Canada which focuses on many of the strategic adaptations being made by unions in order to appeal to and better represent women workers (Briskin and McDermott 1993; White 1993). This paper does not aim to review this literature or its findings. Rather it aims solely to report findings from the survey of organizers that sheds new light on union adaptations to women workers, hence allowing us to assess better whether unions actively recruit women or not. For years, unions have echoed popular feminist sentiments that women are as likely to join unions as men and make good union members. Data from the survey of union organizing drives in Ontario goes even further in pointing to the importance of women as future union members. Analysis of the data (see Table 3) reveals that female dominated workplaces (whether measured as simple majority or as 60% or more of the workforce) are much more likely to vote in favour of unionization in



an organizing campaign than workers in male dominated workplaces (results are significant to .01). Using regression analysis, for every 1% increase in female membership in the workforce, there is a 1% increase in the chance of a union winning the vote for certification (significant to .01). These findings underline the importance of organizing women, and especially female dominated workplaces which tend to be in the service sector, whether private or public, if unions want to improve rates of organizing success and membership gains.

TABLE 3  
Impact of Gender and Selected Union Tactics on the Outcome  
of Organizing Drives

<i>Independent Variable</i>	<i>No. (%) of Organizing Drives</i>	<i>Success Rate</i>	<i>Significance Level (Pearson Chi-Square)</i>
Gender Make-up of Unit <sup>1</sup>			
More than 60% female	236 (35%)	78%	.000
40–60% male/female (mixed)	72 (11%)	67%	
More than 60% male	369 (54%)	62%	
Contact through other Union Member			
Union does not make initial contact through other union members	549 (82%)	66%	.008
Union does make initial contact through other union members	124 (18%)	78%	
Inside Organizing Committee			
Union does not use inside organizing committee	218 (32%)	62%	.016
Union does use inside organizing committee	454 (68%)	71%	
Inside Organizing Committee (Construction Sector Only)			
Union does not use inside organizing committee	101 (72%)	51%	.001
Union does use inside organizing committee	39 (28%)	82%	

<sup>1</sup> In an effort to determine the precise effect of gender on outcome, we ran a regression with following results. With every 1% increase in female membership in bargaining unit, there was 1% increase in chance of union winning the vote for certification (sig.01).

A question remains, however, regarding the extent to which unions actually organize women and female dominated workplaces. An indicator of the extent to which unions organize women and female dominated workplaces can be calculated from analysis of responses to the survey question asking the percentage of women in each workplace where the

union attempted to organize. Survey results show that 36% of all bargaining units where unions made an attempt to unionize the workforce had no women compared to 38% in which the workforce was comprised of 51% or more women. Almost 20% of the bargaining units where attempts to organize were made had workforces comprised of between 80% and 100% women. This data demonstrates that union organizing reflects the segmented nature of the labour market where men and women tend to congregate into certain sectors and jobs, and hence into female or male dominated workplaces. Second, although this data shows that unions do organize a fair proportion of women, they have not used their knowledge of the greater propensity of women to join unions to shift their organizing resources into prioritizing the organization of female dominated workplaces, a conclusion that is reinforced by analysis of union documentation.

### ***UNION STRATEGIES THAT WORK***

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Research on union organizing in the United States has pointed to the impact of union organizing strategy on the successful outcome of organizing drives. Hence what unions do matters (Bronfenbrenner and Juravich 1998; Hurd 1998; Mantzios 1998). Unions that employ rank-and-file intensive strategies were found in the U.S.A. to meet with greater success in organizing. A comprehensive discussion of union strategy in Ontario is beyond the scope of this paper (Yates 2001). But, as the goal of this paper is to assess the likely impact of union organizing on union membership and hence on reversing recent declines in union density, some discussion of union strategy is essential. We will discuss two strategies that arise out of recent decisions to allocate a greater proportion of union resources to organizing.

All the unions discussed above, with the possible exception of CUPE, have invested considerable resources into training and “employing” rank-and-file organizers. In the case of the UBCJA, this constitutes one of their major strategic initiatives as they plan to extend the use of COMET training and with this the use of “salting.” Most of the unions try to match the demographic characteristics and workplace experience of rank-and-file organizers with the workplace being organized. One of the primary responsibilities of the rank-and-file organizer is to establish initial contacts in the workplace from which an inside organizing committee can be built and begin to identify the key issues of concern for workers.

Not only does the use of rank-and-file organizers increase the presence of the union on the ground and give better return on investment (due to high costs associated with employing strictly full-time staff organizers), this strategy also increases union chances of success in an organizing drive.

When unions make initial contact with a workplace through union members from other bargaining units, their chances of success in the organizing drive increase from 66% to 78% (result significant at .01, see Table 3).

The single most important union tactic influencing the success of the organizing drive is the use of an inside organizing committee, a strategy used in 68% of organizing drives. When an inside organizing committee is used, the success rate of the organizing drive jumps from 62% to 71% (result significant at .05). The effect of using inside organizing committees is especially strong in the construction sector (see Table 3). Yet only 28% of organizing drives in the construction sector that were part of the survey used inside organizing committees. These results demonstrate that there is plenty of room for improved organizing success in this sector using this tactic, an outcome that is made more likely as construction unions, including UBCJA, have assigned strategic priority to 'salting' and the use of inside organizing committees and invested heavily in training to achieve this goal.

### ***CONCLUSION***

Government and employer actions have had a decisive influence on union fortunes, including the outcome of certification attempts. Yet this article has also shown that unions can and do play an important strategic role through their organizing strategies in whether union membership expands or declines. In the last five to seven years, all the major unions in Ontario have assigned greater strategic priority to organizing. Many of these unions made earlier commitments to recruitment and union change. But they have been driven to change more rapidly by a sense of crisis precipitated by the election of an anti-union conservative provincial government in 1995, passage of new more restrictive labour laws and reports of declines in union membership. The result has been significant increases in financial and staff resources allocated to organizing, and a more general organizational and cultural shift that assigns greater importance to membership recruitment and, for many unions, diversification. Associated with these changes, unions are becoming more strategic in how they organize, developing and implementing strategies that based on research in the United States and Canada, promise a greater likelihood of organizing success.

At the same time, unions are adapting to changes in the labour market, most notably seen in the growing importance of the private service sector as a source of recruitment of new members. While their track record on organizing women has improved, unions have not adapted as quickly to the strategic organization of women in spite of the greater likelihood of success in recruiting women workers. This underscores the need for

continued organizational and cultural changes that would encourage unions to prioritize the organization of women, similar to the ways in which many unions have recently embraced the organization of "youth" (*Our Times* 1995; CAW 1997b; Luke 1998).

Although union organizing in Ontario has not yet resulted in the recruitment of enough new members to reverse the recent decline in union density, given the strategic role played by unions in influencing membership outcomes and the greater strategic priority assigned to organizing, it is quite likely that unions can reverse this decline. Although one cannot make too much out of membership results for one year, the most recent OLRB statistics for 1998–99 show that unions in Ontario organized 27,299 workers, a higher number than in all but one of the last 17 years. If the union movement follows through with its commitments of increasing resources invested in organizing and employing organizing tactics correlated with higher rates of success, the likelihood of union success increases. But, investment of resources alone is not enough to stem the tide of union membership. Resources must be combined with effective strategy for there to be continued union membership growth.

The biggest danger for unions at present lies in their own internal inertia. For more than twenty years, most unions have concentrated their energies and resources into consolidating their place in the labour market and society more generally. Until recently, few unions paid any attention to organizing; some unions such as the construction trades actively discouraged membership expansion until the last few years. Memberships themselves are often deeply mistrustful of membership recruitment, fearing a loss of membership services as resources are diverted into organizing or a change in union culture as memberships diversify. To translate successfully their initial commitment to organizing into a long-term strategy of union renewal, unions not only have to pay attention to organizing the unorganized but to rebuilding their organizations to ensure that historical tradition and organizational inertia are not the undoing of a needed process of renewal and change.

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## **RÉSUMÉ**

### **Réaction au déclin de l'adhésion syndicale : la syndicalisation en Ontario, 1985–1999**

Les syndicats en Ontario, et au Canada en général, ont dû faire face à une crise d'adhésion. Cette crise est le résultat de la restructuration économique, des changements politiques et législatifs, et des employeurs enhardis dans leur opposition aux syndicats. Les taux de syndicalisation sont en déclin ou stagnants et il y a des bas taux de syndicalisation dans des secteurs croissants de l'économie, plus particulièrement dans les industries de services du secteur privé. Cette étude, centrée sur l'Ontario, examine la réponse des syndicats à ces défis, à travers la syndicalisation des non-syndiqués. Cette étude soutient que, face à un climat politique et économique de plus en plus hostile aux syndicats, les syndicats ont augmenté les ressources investies dans la syndicalisation. Ils ont changé leurs projets

organisationnels et ont décidé de mettre la priorité sur l'organisation des services dans le secteur privé en adoptant plusieurs stratégies d'organisation innovatrices créées pour obtenir un meilleur taux de réussite dans la syndicalisation. L'adoption de ces stratégies démontre que les syndicats sont capables de s'adapter pour faire face à de nouveaux défis. Le résultat probable de l'adoption de cette voie est que les syndicats auront la capacité de renverser le déclin récent dans le taux de syndicalisation et pourront commencer à accroître le nombre de leurs membres.

Les arguments dans cette étude sont fondés sur trois sources d'information : (1) les informations sur l'accréditation syndicale disponibles auprès de la Commission des relations du travail de l'Ontario, (2) un questionnaire détaillé administré aux organisateurs syndicaux, basé sur le travail de Kate Bronfenbrenner aux États-Unis, et (3) des informations qualitatives à partir des entrevues avec des organisateurs syndicaux, les documents de politiques syndicales ainsi que d'autres documents syndicaux internes.

En se basant sur des informations de la Commission des relations du travail de l'Ontario et sur l'analyse publiée de Martinello (2000) sur les accréditations syndicales en Ontario, cette étude démontre que les tentatives de syndicalisation, les réussites et le nombre de salariés recrutés ont été les plus nombreux sous le gouvernement NPD. Quand les conservateurs sont arrivés au pouvoir, ces succès ont diminué, menant, en général, à moins de campagnes de recrutement, à un taux de réussite moins élevé, et à un nombre plus petit d'employés organisés. Cette expérience, qui a rendu les employeurs plus agressifs et qui a accéléré les changements sur le marché du travail, a amené plusieurs syndicats à augmenter leurs efforts de recrutement. En effet, beaucoup de syndicats avaient déjà identifié la syndicalisation comme étant la clé de leur survie.

En examinant les données pour six syndicats — le Syndicat des métallos unis de l'Amérique (MUA), le Syndicat international des travailleurs et travailleuses unis de l'alimentation et du commerce (TUAC), les Travailleurs et les travailleuses canadiens de l'automobile (TCA), la Fraternité unie des charpentiers et menuisiers d'Amérique (FUCMA), le Syndicat canadien de la fonction publique (SCFP) et la Fraternité internationale des Teamsters —, cette étude démontre qu'ils ont augmenté la priorité interne ainsi que les ressources (l'argent et le personnel) consacrées à l'organisation. Cet engagement plus grand et l'investissement dans la syndicalisation a permis à plusieurs des six syndicats de soutenir des efforts qui ont résulté dans un taux de réussite raisonnable pendant les années du gouvernement conservateur et d'hostilité accrue de la part des employeurs. Cette étude soutient que les syndicats ne peuvent pas augmenter le nombre de leurs membres sans un investissement de temps et de ressources accrues ;

mais que ces moyens seuls ne suffisent pas pour faire face à la crise grandissante d'adhésion syndicale. Les stratégies syndicales déterminent comment les ressources sont investies et si ces investissements produisent des résultats satisfaisants. Compte tenu qu'il y a eu un déclin de l'emploi dans les secteurs où historiquement les syndicats étaient fort présents, par exemple dans le secteur manufacturier, l'étude examine deux aspects de la stratégie d'organisation des syndicats : (1) les réponses syndicales aux changements survenus sur le marché du travail, en particulier, la montée du nombre d'emplois dans le secteur privé et dans le taux de participation des femmes au marché du travail, et (2) les stratégies syndicales sélectives pour organiser les non-syndiqués.

En se basant sur les chiffres concernant l'accréditation syndicale de la Commission des relations du travail de l'Ontario et sur les résultats du questionnaire administré auprès des organisateurs syndicaux, l'étude démontre que les syndicats ont changé leurs priorités et ont mis l'emphasis sur l'organisation des non-syndiqués dans les industries de services du secteur privé. Le nombre de demandes pour l'accréditation syndicale dans les industries de services du secteur privé est maintenant rendu au deuxième rang après le nombre de demandes dans le secteur de la construction. Ces demandes d'accréditation dans les industries de services du secteur privé ont augmenté en proportion des demandes totales en Ontario entre les années quatre-vingts et quatre-vingt-dix. Les taux de réussite dans le secteur sont comparables aux taux dans les autres secteurs, et le nombre d'employés syndiqués dans le secteur des services est en deuxième place après le nombre de travailleurs nouvellement syndiqués dans le secteur manufacturier. Un changement dramatique dans la stratégie syndicale s'est manifesté par le fait que les syndicats industriels ont tenté d'organiser plus d'unités d'accréditation dans les industries de services du secteur privé que dans leur base traditionnelle dans le secteur manufacturier. Au sujet de la syndicalisation des femmes, les résultats du questionnaire montrent que les femmes ont une plus grande probabilité de devenir membres d'un syndicat que les hommes. Avec chaque augmentation d'un point de pourcentage dans le nombre des femmes dans l'unité d'accréditation, il y a une augmentation d'un point de pourcentage dans les chances que le syndicat a de gagner un vote d'accréditation. En dépit de ce fait, les syndicats continuent de concentrer la plus grande part de leurs efforts dans les tentatives de syndiquer les lieux de travail où la majorité d'employés sont des hommes.

La dernière section de l'article examine les résultats du questionnaire administré aux organisateurs syndicaux sur la question de l'impact des stratégies syndicales particulières sur la réussite des campagnes de syndicalisation. L'étude démontre que les stratégies intensives impliquant

des militants de la base peuvent être liées à des taux de réussite plus élevés, ce qui confirme les conclusions du travail de Kate Bronfenbrenner sur les syndicats américains. En particulier, les chances de réussite du syndicat dans une campagne de syndicalisation augmentent d'une façon significative si le contact initial, avec l'unité d'accréditation, est établi par un membre du syndicat d'une autre unité d'accréditation, et quand les syndicats établissent des comités de syndicalisation à l'intérieur du lieu de travail.

L'étude conclut qu'en tant qu'acteurs stratégiques, les syndicats exercent une influence sur la destinée de leurs membres à travers leurs activités de syndicalisation. Les syndicats ont été motivés par une atmosphère de crise à développer leurs projets de syndicalisation et ces efforts, s'ils sont réunis avec des ressources accrues et des stratégies syndicales innovatrices, vont probablement avoir un effet positif en renversant le récent déclin et la stagnation du nombre de syndiqués.